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A-ONE #1018 05/02/08

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"

I must be getting old, or at least this body is! Between working out in the yard and working at the golf course, I've got plenty of aches and pains to last quite awhile! But I have to admit, the yard looks much better than it did a few weeks ago! The grass is finally starting to green and grow, now that we've had a little rain. Now some sun and warmth will do wonders for it (okay, add some fertilizer and more seed!).

Are you as amused about the upcoming presidential election as I am? I have to tell you, it's something else. The Democratic candidates bring amusement on a daily basis. While I voted for one of them in the primary (my original choice was out of the race), I'm not sure I could vote for the same candidate now. Not that I'm enamored with the Republican choice, either. None of the candidates is likely to back down from his/her stance on the immigration amnesty issue - one issue I find to be an important one. But, I don't want to dive into that, or other issues in any depth. The reality of the political scene is all too well known, even if it means a few months on the comedy circuit!

So, while I rest these weary bones and watch the television to see what mischief Hillary and Obama are causing, I'll let you get on with this week's issue! Unless, of course, you're getting your own dose of our political comedy (or is that comedic politics?)!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, spring may be on its way, but you'd never know it by looking out my window. It's chilly, damp and dreary out there. Last week was just the opposite: Warm, dry, sunny and very very spring-like. Of course, last week I decided that mowing the lawn could wait for just "a couple more days". Well, now I've got tufts of grass that will be hitting the foot-high mark before long... especially

if we continue to get the soft, light rain that we're getting right now.

Well, that's kind of the story of my life... when I zig, the Universe zags. I often wonder, if I'd picked an IBM as my first computer, if there'd be "IBM Orphan" forums on the internet, and if the ST would have gained and retained world dominance. [grin]

On the political front, I don't do much better, by the way. Out of seven Presidential elections I've participated in, I've only been on the 'winning' side twice (three times, if you want to buck the Supreme Court). Heck, if I were a ball player, I'd have been traded and kicked down to the minor leagues ages ago.

I'm not going to get deep into politics today, so you can breathe a sigh of relief. I just want to mention that it's getting dirtier and dirtier. Now, if you've read this column for any amount of time, you know that I'm a liberal democrat. I was shocked and horrified when John Kerry was 'swiftboated'. I was not, however, surprised. This type of tactic has been a part of the American political process since the beginning, but it really found its niche under Richard Nixon, and has been a mainstay of his party ever since.

Now don't you crotchety old conservatives jump up and shake your fists too quickly. You don't want to tax your tiny little hearts. Take a deep breath, count to ten, and repeat your party mantra "Watergate... Iran/Contra... Big Oil... Recession... Patriot Act... Wire Taps... Watergate... Iran/Contra... Big Oil... Recession... Patriot Act... Wire Taps...".

There. Now don't you feel better?

One thing that has me scratching my head is people (conservative people) referring to the Obamas as 'elitists'. These are people who grew up without the benefit of huge family fortunes and without the prestige of having "Hitler's American Banker" as a grandfather. They grew up middle-class at best... just like you and I. Now, if you want to hold it against them that they were intelligent, driven, dedicated and focused then, yeah, I guess you could call them 'elite'.

I still remember the day Dan Quayle said that it was time to stop the rule of the 'Intellectual Elite'. I thought to myself, "Yeah, let's let a really dumb guy run the country for a change... If I'd only known...

It's going to be an interesting election, that's for sure. Voter registration is through the roof... something unheard of this far from November... and I'm guessing that we're going to see voter turnout for the election that will put to shame the statistics for the past half-decade.

Well, if you don't vote, you shouldn't complain. So I guess it's possible that we've just got record numbers of people lining up to complain. [grin]

Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Didier Mequignon posts this about the Links web browser with SpeedoGDOS:

"Now Links can load and use external SpeedoGDOS fonts, it’s faster, for more informations for activate it:
http://aniplay.atari.org/links/index-e.htm
http://links2.atari.org is created but actually not active.

Direct link for the archive (sources, rsc and prg):
http://didier.mequignon.free.fr/files/links-2.1pre33.m68kgdos.tgz

This update works under MiNT and also under MagiC (screenshots are under MagiC) since fork call are removed, but I cannot use get a connection with MagiCNet.

VA protocol and drag & drop are supported.
Background window redraw faster.
"connection would bock" problems are fixed.
Icon bar redraws on multiple windows fixed. "

Frank Szymanski tells Didier:

"Thanks a lot for your efforts Didier. I am glad to have a browser on my ATARI that is capable of Javascript and SSL. Unfortunately on my Afterburner equipped Falcon with NOVA graphics card (1280x1024x256 resolution) both versions of Links are very slow. Especially re-rendering when changing the window resolution takes a lot of time.

Perhaps I did something wrong or is it just the fact that the Afterburner is so much slower compared to ct60?"

Phantomm continues a conversation from last week about the program ’OutSide’:

"If I remember correctly, I have version 3.20 of OutSide... I’m not at my software storage at the moment, so that may be the wrong version number. I’m actually outside at the moment.

Anyhow, When using OutSide on a Stock Atari such as a 1040STe or Falcon 030, will the software keep up with software/hardware packages, that allow Video and/or Sound Digitizing?

That’s the main reason I’d like to use it, so that I can Grab very long Video and Audio Clips."

Uwe Seimet tells Phantomm:

"The last version released and available for download on my website is 3.51.

This [speed] depends a lot on how this software actually works, you should give it a try."

Last week, we talked a little bit about sockets for the 68000 chip in 1040STEs, and Phantomm mentioned that he thought he’d seen some adaptor boards. This week he tells us:

"I found what I think will work.

I had forgotten that I bought several adapter boards a few years back. Found them while looking at my Panther Graphic board adapters.

Which now I believe were made for the MegaST, due to the long 68000 empty socket on them with pins for a long 68000 socket on the other side.

Adapter Boards...
On one side is a socket for the long 68000, and on the other are pins configured just like a square 68000. 2 of these boards are from Compo and the other 2 are GE Soft from Germany. All of them look the same except for the color.

I have a Fast Tech. 16mhz upgrade (long 68000). That's switchable between 8mhz/16mhz. But it does require a power source. Think it was made for a Mega ST. So hopefully, I just have to plug them all together in my 1040STe.

I suppose this is what these boards are for. Does anyone recall any other hardware upgrades for the MegaST or etc., that connected over, or in place of a long 68000?

Maybe using one of the adapter boards I could get a Panther working in a 1040STe which would be nice. Of course the shielding would have to be modified, but I think it will all squeeze in there."

'T Shadow' tells Phantomm:

"I had my MegaST4 socketed so it would accept an ICD AdSpeed and a TEC card to add TOS 2.06. Connected the TEC card so TOS was switchable. Geeze that was a long time ago. Seems like the AdSpeed was on the original CPU and I didn't go to the socket until adding the TEC card.

I had a PC Ditto2 on the CPU for a while too. I was one of the lucky ones that got it working. Unfortunately lost interest after discovering it was only 4 color.

As far as I know everything was made to fit the CPU so they could be used on the standard ST too. Megabus connector is still a virgin.

Could the boards be an adapter to use a square CPU in the MegaST/ST? Seems like an adapter like that was made. Don't recall details or even for sure."

Phantomm replies:

"It would probably be possible to do that with these boards, but they would have to be modified/ fitted with a couple rows of pins and a socket for a square CPU.

As is there is just a plain socket for the Long CPU and very small pins for the Square CPU. It looks like one leaves the Square CPU in place and inserts this board into the socket overtop the original CPU. There are no components on the boards, not even a resistor.

According to the dates, they were made in 91/92.
Maybe they are just various project boards?"

Well folks, that’s it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Grand Theft Auto 4 Is Out!
GTA 4 Release Under Fire!
MADD Wants Higher Rating!
And much more!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

"Grand Theft Auto 4" Set To Entertain and Inflame

Beatings, carjackings, drive-by shootings, drunk driving and hookers. For video game fans, it can only mean one thing: "Grand Theft Auto 4" is here, with all the subtlety of a shotgun blast.

The latest chapter in the wildly popular and controversial criminal action franchise from Take-Two Interactive Software Inc is poised to be the biggest entertainment product of the year, with expected first-week sales of up to $400 million - dwarfing Hollywood’s biggest box-office openings.

The handiwork of Take-Two’s Rockstar game studio headed by British brothers Sam and Dan Houser, "Grand Theft Auto 4," which will be launched next Tuesday, promises to crank up the thuggish drama that made previous installments the equivalent of "The Godfather" for Generation PlayStation.

"We also felt over the last few years there hadn’t been a great standout gangster movie. Maybe we could do something ourselves that would live alongside that stuff," Rockstar’s Dan Houser told Variety magazine in a recent interview.

The gobs of processing power provided by Microsoft Corp’s Xbox 360 and Sony Corp’s PlayStation 3 gaming consoles allowed Rockstar to imbue even background characters with personalities and unique behaviors.

"The game just feels like a movie now. The camera angles, the little details and things you look for in a film are things they can do now,"

said Ricardo Torres, editor-in-chief of GameSpot, a leading gaming review Web site.

Of course, it would not be a "Grand Theft Auto" game without controversy.

The series that gave gamers the freedom to shoot cops and hook up with prostitutes before beating them up and stealing their money has added drunk driving and lap dances to its repertoire of vicarious thrills.

"A lot of it is done just tongue-in-cheek. It has that same sense of humor (as past games) that is very juvenile but at the same time is a parody of American culture," said Crispin Boyer, senior executive editor of video games for the 1UP Network.

Previous GTA games have been a lightning rod for criticism by politicians. 2008 Presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton said in 2005 that the series was demeaning to women.

The negative publicity has not stopped GTA from becoming one of the most successful game franchises ever, having sold 70 million copies worldwide and spawning legions of imitators.

The game may also determine the fate of Take-Two, which is resisting a $2 billion takeover offer from rival Electronic Arts Inc. If sales are stronger than the already lofty expectations, it could force EA to pay more.

A dystopian coming-to-America story, "Grand Theft Auto 4" revolves around an Eastern European immigrant who ends up running illicit errands for local mob bosses.

Yet the game is not without moral consequence. Players face tough choices regarding who lives or dies and whether ambition is more important than friendship, decisions that affect the outcome of the story.

"Grand Theft Auto 3," debuted in 2001 and was seen as a new beginning for the franchise because it defined a new genre of "open world" games that gave players unprecedented freedom. Two unnumbered games in the series have launched since, each with lots of sales, and lots of controversy.

"’Grand Theft Auto’ really speaks to a new age of gaming. It’s a type of gaming that is culturally relevant," said Geoff Keighley, host of Spike TV’s GameTrailers TV show.

The game carries a Mature rating, meaning retailers are not supposed to sell it those under 17 years old, but critics charge the industry rating system is easily skirted and that children will end up playing the game anyway.

"We are calling on all major retailers to reconsider any decisions to sell this," said Tim Winter, president of the Parents Television Council, a media content watchdog.

Rockstar, which declined requests for an interview with the Housers, bristles at such suggestions. "If this was a movie or TV show and was the best in its field, you’d give it loads of awards and put those awards shows on television," Dan Houser told Variety.

Video Game’s Release Under Fire

A best-selling video game series, Grand Theft Auto, is releasing a new version Tuesday amid a firestorm of concern about the impact of violent games on children.

The Chicago Transit Authority is pulling ads for the game off its buses. The Parents Television Council is calling on retailers to keep it away from children. The PTA has a campaign to explain ratings.

More than a dozen bids in five states and four in Congress would limit sales of some games to children. Since 2005, nine states have passed laws to restrict game sales but none survived court challenges.

"These games are patently offensive and violent," says Minnesota Solicitor General Alan Gilbert, who is appealing a court ruling that found no "incontrovertible" proof the games trigger violence in kids.

Rockstar Games, the series maker, declined to comment. The video game industry has responded to critics by agreeing to restrict the advertising and sale of M-rated games. Most major retailers say they won’t sell them to anyone under 17. Yet random checks by the Federal Trade Commission found that 42% of retailers did.

Hal Halpin, president of the Entertainment Consumers Association, says generational bias fuels the criticism: "People who haven’t grown up with games won’t understand them."

A new book, Grand Theft Childhood, says games, even some violent ones, may have social benefits.

"Video games are now a social tool for boys," who use them to interact and build friendships, says co-author Lawrence Kutner, who is on the Harvard medical school faculty. The games also teach kids to solve problems, the book says.

A study for the book found Grand Theft Auto, rated "M" for "mature," was the most popular game among boys and second among girls, whose favorite was The Sims (rated "T" for "teen").

The Grand Theft Auto series, which has sold 30 million games since its launch in 1997, includes the all-time PlayStation best seller San Andreas. In the new version, an immigrant is dragged into a bloody criminal underworld. The rating warns of "intense violence" and "strong sexual content."

Despite benefits, the study found that kids who played M-rated games were more likely to get into fights, damage property, steal from a store and receive poor grades.

Studies show that "a heavy diet of these games puts kids at risk for aggression" says David Walsh, president of the National Institute on Media and the Family.

MADD Wants Higher Adults-Only Rating for GTA IV

Mothers Against Drunk Driving, founded in 1980 to combat drunk driving, has urged the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) to raise the rating for Grand Theft Auto IV from Mature (17+) to Adults-Only. MADD notes that GTA IV contains a module that allows players to simulate driving drunk.

"Each year nearly 13,500 people die in drunk-driving crashes and another half a million are injured in alcohol-related traffic crashes," MADD said. "Drunk driving is not a game and it is not a joke. Drunk driving is a choice, a violent crime and it is also 100 percent preventable."

MADD also wants the game's manufacturers, Rockstar North and its parent Take-Two, to consider halting distribution of the game, "if not out of responsibility to society, then out of respect for the millions of victims/survivors of drunk driving."

It's highly unlikely that Take-Two and Rockstar North will pull the game. Despite some reports of technical difficulties, GTA IV is shattering sales records. The Entertainment Leisure Software Publishers' Association reported Thursday that GTA IV sold more than 600,000 copies in its first 24 hours in the United Kingdom, a full 20 percent above the record set by Grand Theft: San Andreas in 2004.

In a statement to the Associated Press on Wednesday, Rockstar North dismissed the suggestion that the drunk-driving module would affect player behavior in the real world.

"We have a great deal of respect for MADD's mission," the company said, "but we believe the mature audience for Grand Theft Auto IV is more than sophisticated enough to understand the game's content." The company went on to say that GTA IV should not be judged "by a small aspect of the game."

The line between a Mature (17+) and an Adults-Only (AO) rating may not be much wider than a G-string, but it can mean millions of dollars for a video-game manufacturer. Both Sony and Microsoft will not allow AO games on their PlayStation and Xbox consoles, and virtually all the major retailers refuse to carry AO games. From a marketing perspective, the net effect of an AO rating is essentially the same as banning the game outright.

According to the Web site for the ESRB, GTA IV's "Mature (17+)" rating was based on the following content: "Intense Violence, Blood, Strong Language, Strong Sexual Content, Partial Nudity, Use of Drugs and Alcohol."

By contrast, the ESRB slapped an AO rating on Take-Two's previous Grand Theft release, San Andreas, due to its "Blood and Gore, Intense Violence, Nudity, Strong Language, Strong Sexual Content, Use of Drugs."

That decision, driven in part by criticism from Sen. Hillary Clinton, was controversial because the "strong sexual content" was only visible after applying a third-party modification called "Hot Coffee." However, since the ratings change came some weeks after the game's release, it did not materially affect its sales figures.

British Snap Up Ninetendo's Wii Fit Video Game

For a nation perhaps better known for a fitness regimen of darts and a pint, the news from Elspa Ltd.’s Chart-Track was particularly startling. The data-compilation service, which among other things tallies the sale of software titles, announced that last week Nintendo’s Wii Fit was the top-selling title in the United Kingdom. The company’s Mario Kart Wii dropped to the number-two position.

Chart-Track said Wii Fit had the sixth-fastest-selling launch of any software title, recording more than $32 million in sales in its first seven days. Approximately one in 10 Wii owners in the United Kingdom purchased Wii Fit, the company said. Only games from the industry’s major franchises - Gran Turismo, Grand Theft Auto and Halo - did better than Wii Fit in their opening weeks.

The strong debut by Wii Fit was considered all the more remarkable because of the higher cost for the title. The software is bundled with a proprietary balance board used in game activities, including step aerobics, jogging and even yoga. The board can measure a player’s weight, center of gravity, and body-mass index, and a suggestion has been made that it could enable medical professionals to remotely assist patients with rehabilitation activities.

Together, the Wii Fit software and balance board retail for E70 (US$138) in England. A similar package is scheduled to debut in the U.S. on May 19 for $89.99. That is much more expensive than the general version of Grand Theft Auto IV, which retails for $59.99, but Take-Two also offers a "special edition" that costs $89.99.

The success of Wii Fit in the UK and its upcoming release in the U.S., where sales of the Wii console have been particularly strong, will only add to what has been a terrific year for Nintendo.

Just a week ago, for instance, Nintendo’s Mario Kart Wii racked up the eighth-fastest launch in UK history. That same week, Nintendo announced that net sales for the year ending March 31 were up 73 percent over the previous year, and the company’s net income of $2.5 billion was a 47 percent increase over its 2007 revenues.

The news marks a strong turnaround from just a few months ago, when Nintendo was struggling to produce enough Wii consoles to meet demand over the holiday season. But those problems appear to be resolved. Nintendo says it has sold more than 18 million Wiis so far, and expects to move another 25 million by next March.

Already, 26 software titles for the Wii have sold more than a million copies, a total that Nintendo clearly expects to increase.

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Infogrames To Buy Rest of Atari for $11 Million

Infogrames Entertainment plans to buy the rest of beleaguered video games pioneer Atari for US$11 million, the companies said Wednesday.

Infogrames, based in Lyon, France, owns 51.4 percent of Atari's stock. The merger will give Atari shareholders $1.68 per share in cash.

The deal must be approved by shareholders. Atari plans to call a special meeting on the merger after July, the companies said. However, since Infogrames owns a majority of shares, it could push the deal forward without the approval of Atari's current shareholders.

Infogrames said the merger will allow it to have more control over restructuring Atari to become a bigger player in the North American market. It will also loan Atari $20 million to keep its operations going until the deal is complete.

Atari dominated the video game console market in the late 1970s and early 1980s with classic games such as Pong, Asteroids and Space Invaders. But game and console makers such as Nintendo and Sega later stole Atari's crown. The company never fully recovered.

In May 2007, Atari said it would cut its workforce by 20 percent and spend between $800,000 and $1.1 million on restructuring the company.

Since last October, Infogrames has been working with Atari to stabilize and focus its distribution efforts. The Atari Group, which operates in the U.S., Europe and Asia, produces games such as Alone in the Dark, V-Rally, Test Drive, Backyard and licenses others such as Dragon Ball Z.

Those games are produced for a variety of platforms, including Sony's PSP and PlayStations 2 and 3, Microsoft's Xbox 360 and Nintendo's DS, Wii and GameBoy Advance.

In March, Jim Wilson, a video-game industry veteran, was appointed as Atari's CEO. Wilson most recently worked as executive vice president and general manager of Sony Wonder, part of Sony BMG's home entertainment business.

Infogrames has owned the Atari name since 2001, and it has been releasing games under the Atari moniker since then.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Microsoft/Yahoo Deadline Passes With No Deal

Yahoo failed to agree to an acquisition deal with Microsoft by Saturday,

the deadline Microsoft had set for wrapping up negotiations.

Now Microsoft must decide whether to pursue a hostile takeover via a proxy fight or to drop the bid and seek other acquisition alternatives.

All along, Microsoft’s management had indicated strongly that they would pursue Yahoo via all available options, including the hostile route of ousting the current board by proposing its own slate of director candidates at the next Yahoo shareholders’ meeting.

But Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer and CFO Chris Liddell softened that stance in public comments last week, saying that giving up on the acquisition would also be an option.

On Sunday, Yahoo declined to comment. Microsoft responded by pointing to comments Liddell made on Thursday during Microsoft’s earnings announcement.

"Unless we make progress with Yahoo towards an agreement by this weekend, we will reconsider our alternatives. We will provide updates as appropriate next week, these alternatives clearly including taking an offer to the Yahoo shareholders, or to withdraw our proposal and focus on other opportunities, both organic and inorganic," Liddell said then.

Citing anonymous sources, The Wall Street Journal reported Sunday that Microsoft, Yahoo and their advisers have held talks in recent weeks but didn’t achieve enough progress to hammer out a deal by Saturday.

The process has clearly been frustrating for Microsoft’s management, who have maintained that their offer is fair and that they don’t see a reason to revise it. Ballmer and his team have shown signs of getting impatient with the slow progress, not surprising considering Microsoft’s urgency at boosting its underperforming Internet business and competing better against Google.

Launching a proxy fight would prolong even further the acquisition process and make the fight even nastier. Even if Microsoft were to win, it would not be a good start to what would be an arduous and lengthy post-acquisition integration process.

In the meantime, Google would no doubt seek to capitalize on the internal turmoil within Microsoft and Yahoo by trying to poach clients and valuable employees.

As soon as Microsoft announced its bid for Yahoo on Feb. 1 - valued at US$44.6 billion [b] at the time - Yahoo’s management began seeking and considering alternatives, while its stock began to rise from the latest pre-bid price of $19.18.

By the time Yahoo’s board formally rejected the unsolicited offer on Feb. 11, saying it undervalued the company, Yahoo’s stock price had risen to $29.87, erasing the offer’s premium. The next day, Microsoft hinted in a letter to Yahoo that it wouldn’t shy away from attempting a hostile takeover.

Since the bid’s announcement, Yahoo CEO and co-founder Jerry Yang has held conversations with various companies including Google, AOL, Disney and News Corp., exploring alternative deals that would strengthen Yahoo’s business and relieve the pressure on it to be acquired.

On April 5, Microsoft, clearly impatient, threatened Yahoo's board of directors with a proxy battle if it wouldn't agree to a buy-out in the next three weeks. That's the deadline that lapsed on Saturday.

"The focus will be on Microsoft tomorrow [Monday] to make some statement about its intentions," said industry analyst Greg Sterling from Sterling Market Intelligence.

While there is still a reasonable chance that Microsoft will launch a proxy fight, it also seems much more likely than it did three weeks ago that Microsoft will drop its bid, Sterling said. Microsoft's management was clearly expecting a much smoother acquisition process, he said.

"Microsoft's tone during the initial call [announcing the bid] was that this was pretty much 'fait accompli' and that they were already looking past the deal towards the integration process," Sterling said. "Microsoft has been surprised to a degree and really frustrated by the resistance."

No alternative deal has materialized for Yahoo, except for a very limited, albeit eyebrow-raising, test that saw Yahoo run Google ads along with some search engine results on Yahoo.com. Observers speculated that the test, announced on April 9, could lead to a full-blown outsourcing of Yahoo's search ad business to Google, a move that financial analysts believe could boost Yahoo's revenue.

Yahoo also has made overt maneuvers to buy itself time. For example, on March 5, Yahoo lifted the following week's deadline for nominating directors to its board, an attempt to discourage Microsoft from launching a proxy fight to replace the current board with members willing to approve its Yahoo acquisition bid. Yahoo hasn't yet set a date for its shareholders' meeting.

On March 18, Yahoo kicked off a tour to investors by dusting off a three-month-old financial plan to reinforce its contention that Yahoo is worth much more than Microsoft offered to pay for it. The plan, originally presented to Yahoo's board in December, predicts that Yahoo will double its operating cash flow over the next three years from US$1.9 billion to $3.7 billion. The plan also forecasts that, subtracting the commission that Yahoo pays to sites in its advertising network, Yahoo will generate $8.8 billion in revenue in 2010. Financial analysts agreed the plan is highly optimistic.

Yahoo also has been in hyperactive mode with product and strategy announcements since Microsoft's bid, always pointing out that each initiative proved that it is able to improve its situation as an independent company. For example, it acquired online video player Maven Networks, announced its social network OneConnect mobile service, re-launched its video site and introduced Yahoo Buzz, a social news site that has been well received.

It also announced AMP, a new advertising management platform that it says will greatly simplify buying and selling ads online, and that will roll out in phases starting in 2008's third quarter and continuing into 2009. Yahoo also added video to Flickr and joined Google's OpenSocial project of common APIs for social networking applications.

Last week, it announced its most ambitious plan yet to take advantage of the popularity of social networking. Yahoo Open Strategy calls for the company to swing wide open the doors of its Web platforms to let outside developers create applications across its network of sites, starting with

its search engine via a beta project called Search Monkey.

Also last week, Yahoo reported 2008 first quarter earnings that were considered solid, although not stellar, and that Yang said prove the company is in the rebound. Yahoo grew its revenue and net income and exceeded Wall Street’s expectations for both categories.

Of course, there have been also reminders of why Yahoo found itself an acquisition target. The most concrete was on Feb. 12 when Yahoo, as it had been planning to do, started laying off about 1,000 staffers, and prominent executives like Bradley Horowitz, vice president of product strategy, voluntarily gave up on the company and left, in Horowitz’s case to arch-rival Google.

Microsoft Ups Offer for Yahoo by ’Several Dollars’

Microsoft Corp. reportedly dangled a higher takeover bid in front of Yahoo Inc. Friday, hoping to reach a friendly deal after weeks of saber rattling.

The Redmond, Wash.-based software maker upped its offer "by several dollars" per share, according to a New York Times report that cited unnamed sources.

Representatives from Microsoft and Yahoo declined to comment on the negotiations, which were confirmed by a person familiar with the talks. The person didn’t want to be identified because of the talks are still confidential.

Yahoo began pressing for a higher offer shortly after Microsoft made its unsolicited bid in February, which was originally valued at $44.6 billion, or $31 per share.

That offer, which was made half in cash and half in stock, is currently valued at $42.3 billion, or $29.40 per share, because Microsoft shares have declined.

Microsoft Chief Executive Steve Ballmer had held firm with the original offer, insisting it was fair in light of Yahoo’s eroding profits during the past two years. He threatened an attempt to oust Yahoo’s board if the 10 directors, including Chief Executive Jerry Yang, didn’t accept the offer by April 26.

Now that Yahoo has forced the issue by letting the deadline pass, Ballmer appears ready to put more money on the table.

Microsoft’s board reportedly met earlier this week to consider raising the bid as high as $33 per share. It wasn’t clear whether Microsoft presented that figure, which would translate to about $47.5 billion for the deal, to Yahoo Friday.

Several of Yahoo’s shareholders are reportedly looking to sell their stakes for at least $35 per share, a price that would value the deal about $50 billion.

Most analysts have predicted all along that Microsoft eventually would buy Yahoo for $32 to $35 per share, so the news of Friday’s negotiations

wasn’t a major surprise.

"It’s all going according to script," said Ken Marlin, a New York investment banker specializing in technology deals.

AMD Launches First Computer Brand

Advanced Micro Devices Inc on Sunday unveiled its first computer brand, aimed at small and medium-sized businesses, with design and sales help from its major chip customers such as Dell Inc.

AMD Business Class desktop personal computers will be followed by notebook PCs in the second half of this year.

AMD customers who plan to sell the computers include Acer, Dell, Fujitsu-Siemens, Hewlett-Packard Co, and Lenovo, said Hal Speed, a marketing architect for AMD based in Austin.

"It’s not like retail," he said. "People are buying this for work and we really tried to identify the nuggets (of technology for business desktop PCs) that weren’t being looked at."

The new product line is part of AMD’s efforts to regain its competitive edge against Intel Corp after a disastrous 2007. AMD has reported six consecutive quarters of net losses as Intel has regained much of the market share that it lost to AMD in 2005 and the first part of 2006.

AMD is also seeking to use the leverage it built with the success of its Opteron microprocessors, which have made inroads into the server market over the last few years against Intel, a larger company.

"AMD has tackled the consumer market, they’ve made significant inroads into the mobile PC market, and they’ve made some inroads into the business market," said Dean McCarron, an analyst at market research firm In-Stat. "This is an important program for them."

AMD said Business Class is initially aimed at the small- and medium-size business market, but is also designed to scale up to the biggest corporate clients as well. The desktops include AMD Phenom X3 triple-core and AMD Phenom X4 quad-core processors as well as AMD AthlonX2 dual-core processors.

PC makers can also choose AMD 780V chipsets or optional ATI Radeon HO 3000 series graphics chips, and the platform will also support non-AMD graphics and chipsets, such as graphics chips from ATI rival Nvidia Corp.

Analysts said that big-business customers like a General Electric Co as well as small and medium businesses want stability, longevity, reliability, manageability and good performance in the PCs they buy for their employees.

"Where AMD has been lacking is in business PCs with deployments in the thousands of units," said Roger Kay, an analyst with Endpoint Technologies Associates, a market research firm.

"Big companies replace thousands of PCs over the course of more than a year and during that time they don’t want what they are buying to change

in terms of configurations."

HP Lab Creates Revolutionary New Form of Memory

Computers that boot instantly to the exact place where you left off and mobile devices that don’t need recharging for weeks. These are only some of the possibilities resulting from Hewlett-Packard research that proves the existence of what the company described as "the fourth fundamental circuit element in electrical engineering."

In a paper published in Wednesday’s edition of Nature magazine, four researchers from HP’s Information and Quantum System Labs discussed their creation of a mathematical model and physical example of what is called a "memristor," a conjoined word formed from "memory" and "resistor."

The researchers said memristors can lead to computer systems with memories that are not erased when power is lost, do not need to be booted up, are very low-power, and, in another encroachment on the uniqueness of humans, associate information "in a manner similar to that of the human brain."

The possibility of such an electronic component was first theorized nearly 40 years ago by Leon Chua, a professor in the electrical engineering and computer sciences department at the University of California, Berkeley.

Chua said there was a fourth fundamental circuit element, the memristor, to accompany the existing three - resistor, capacitor and inductor. He also theorized that its properties could not be obtained by any combination of the other three. Like chemical elements, fundamental circuit elements cannot be created from the others.

R. Stanley Williams, head of the HP team, said the research will make it "possible for engineers to develop integrated circuit designs that could dramatically improve the performance and energy efficiency" for PCs and data centers.

The researchers also suggested that memristor-based computers could help the momentum toward "cloud computing," in which applications and data are stored throughout many servers in-house, or on the Internet. Memristors could mean much less power to drive that infrastructure, and a greater resiliency in a data center if power is interrupted.

Memristors could lead to a new kind of computer memory that could complement or even replace the common DRAM (dynamic random-access memory), which does not store information when power is turned off.

Memristor-based memory can also lead to fundamentally different ways of using computer memory. The researchers said memristor technology can recall and make associations between events that are similar to how a human brain recognizes patterns.

In fact, Chua’s original paper proposed that memristors would act in ways that are similar to how synapses work in a brain. One of the ways is that the more often a signal is sent to a synapse, which connects two neurons, the stronger the synapse becomes.

The HP team has told news media that this enhanced ability to deal with patterns could allow computers to makes decisions based on past data. This might include, for instance, the development of a more intelligent microwave that knows the heating times that you prefer for different kinds of foods. But it won't happen overnight. The first commercial uses are not expected for at least five years.

One Laptop Per Child Controversy Centers on Windows

The One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) initiative wants more kinds of Sugar, and some developers are not sweet on that idea. Sugar is the user interface created for the low-cost laptop developed by a team headed by MIT Media Lab co-founder Nicholas Negroponte. The XO laptop, originally intended for a price point of $100 and incorporating an open-source Linux operating system, is designed for use by children in third-world countries.

This week, Negroponte indicated that Sugar is not only a great interface for Linux, but for Windows as well. "Sugar is a very good idea, less than perfectly executed," he wrote in a posting on an OLPC site. It needs to be "disentangled," he said, from collaborative tools, power management, and other functions, so it can be modularized and evolve more efficiently.

He is also seeking to have it run on top of Windows, which has soured the enthusiasm of some for the XO. The laptop, if sold in the tens of millions worldwide as originally envisioned and if based on Linux, could become a key driver in moving that open-source operating system toward popularity on the desktop.

Negroponte has confirmed that OLPC has been in discussion for several months with Microsoft about a dual-boot version of the XO. In October, a Microsoft executive told news media that the company was spending "a nontrivial amount of money" on adapting Windows for the XO.

Negroponte, in his e-mail, said "some purism has to morph into pragmatism" as the organization reaches out to engage a wider community, and it is "absurd" to suggest this "forsakes open source or redirects our mission."

Some of the developers upset about the current direction are inside OLPC. On Wednesday, OLPC developer C. Scott Ananian posted a reply on the organization's site, in which he publicly criticized Negroponte for not providing the resources to accommodate Windows development for the XO.

OLPC "has not hired any Windows developers" and has not adjusted its time line for such a port, he wrote. If you are serious about Sugar on Windows, Ananian told Negroponte in his posting, you need to immediately hire at least 10 Windows developers "and inform the deployment countries that we are placing a hold on new development" for at least six months while the port is completed.

Even with that effort, Ananian wrote, the result will be a new version of Sugar that will run no better than the one on Linux. "From an IT management perspective," he added, "this is madness."

The turbulence surrounding OLPC has not been calmed by the recent departure of Walter Bender, who had been head of software and content. He

told news media that he left because of differences with Negroponte over OLPC’s positioning.

In his posting earlier this week, Bender questioned whether the goal of OLPC was "simply to get laptops into the hands of as many children as possible," rather than developing open-source software better suited for third-world countries and for learning.

If it is simply getting as many laptops into children’s hands as possible, he asked, and "if others are making low-cost laptops that run Windows," why don’t those laptops fulfill the goal?

Mark Margevicius, a research director with industry research firm Gartner, said OLPC’s first mission has always been getting a laptop into each child’s hands, by any means necessary - and not to be an incubation farm for new technology. The new technology, he said, was a means to an end.

If success is measured by the "ability to move some of the industry’s giants, like Intel or Microsoft" to see the opportunity that awaited them among third-world children, Margevicius said, then OLPC has been a success. But if it’s measured by the number of laptops it sells, he added, "the jury is still out."

For 30 Years Now, You’ve Been Getting Spam

This week, the world will mark an anniversary that has changed the face - and other anatomical regions - of email inboxes everywhere: the first known spam email was sent 30 years ago on Saturday.

But the message sent on May 3, 1978 by a marketer for the now defunct DEC computer company to around 400 people on the west coast of the United States wasn’t called spam, and the sender dispatched it without ill intent.

How things have changed.

Spam got its name from a skit by the television show "Monty Python’s Flying Circus," in which a group of Vikings in a restaurant that serves all of its food with Spam tinned meat sing a song repeating the word ad nauseum, says Brad Templeton, who has thoroughly researched the subject.

"Thus, the meaning of the term at least: something that keeps repeating and repeating to great annoyance," Templeton, who was dabbling in the Internet in the 1970s - when it was still the US government-run Arpanet - says on his website.

These days spamming is a sophisticated operation that affects millions and jams ill-prepared email inboxes.

The percentage of spam sent to account holders on Gmail - the email service offered by Google - quadrupled between 2004 and 2008, climbing from 20 percent to around 80 percent.

"To give you some sense of scale, we have tens of millions of users worldwide," Gmail’s Jason Freidenfelds told AFP, adding that only about one percent of spam gets through Gmail’s spam-filtering system, according

to user feedback.

Spam methodology has also changed in the past 30 years.

Whereas the sender of the first spam had to type in each recipient’s address individually, today the job is often done remotely using cyber-monsters called botnets.

Botnets have hijacked around 30 percent of personal and office computers with inadequate security features and use them to dispatch thousands of spams each day, Templeton told AFP.

"The recruited computers wait for commands that come through anonymous channels and tell them to send spam email to 1,000 people, all unbeknownst to their owners. The people who do this control millions of computers around the world," Templeton said.

"Don’t look to the guy to your left, don’t look to the guy to your right. It’s you," he said ominously.

Spam content and motives have also evolved since the 1978 message, which was an invitation to a product launch.

Spams today come from Nigerian "princes" or fictitious relatives of deceased African dictators intent on hoodwinking email account holders into parting with bank details or cash, in exchange for a slice of the wealth stashed in an offshore account.

More vicious spammers last year shut down government and business websites in European Union member Estonia by bombarding servers with traffic, a technique also used by a new breed of spammer, the online extortionist.

"The extortionist says, ’Lovely business you have, would be terrible if something happened to it.’ And if you don’t pay protection money, they get machines to just pound away at the web server all day so it can no longer work," said Templeton.

But the most common form of spam remains the unsolicited message that tries to sell you a replica Rolex, a miracle weight loss formula, or medication to enlarge anatomical parts or enhance sexual prowess.

Twelve percent of Internet users have bought something offered to them by spam, Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant at IT security company Sophos, told AFP.

"Maybe these people are too embarrassed to go to their doctor or they want to save some money, but we have to educate them to report spam, delete spam, but absolutely never buy off spam," he said.

"A Brazilian model died after using weight loss pills she bought off spam ... The person who spams does not have a strong ethical sense," he warned.

Last year, 75 percent of Americans who were tricked by Internet fraudsters into parting with 239.09 million dollars (152.5 million euros) were ensnared through a spam message, according to a report by the FBI.

But despite the warnings, the spammers still fish and people still bite.

"P.T Barnum was right when he said there’s a sucker born every minute," said Templeton. "I’ll expand it to say there’s a sucker spammed every second."

Radio Free Europe Says It’s Under Cyber Attack

Several Web sites of the U.S.-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty have been attacked, the broadcaster said Monday, suggesting the Belarus government could be responsible.

In the form of a denial-of-service attack that floods servers with fake traffic so legitimate visitors cannot get through, the assault began Saturday and continues, the network said in a statement.

The broadcaster said it is trying to restore its Web sites.

The attack is aimed mainly the site of Radio Free Europe’s Belarus service, but Web sites serving Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Kosovo, Macedonia, Bosnia and Croatia also have been affected, the network said.

Jeffrey Gedmin, the network’s president, compared the attack to communist countries jamming U.S.-backed broadcasts during the Cold War.

"Dictators are still trying to prevent the kind of unfiltered news and information that (Radio Free Europe) provides from reaching their people," Gedmin said. "They did not succeed in the last century and they will not succeed now."

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty is a private, nonprofit corporation that receives funding from the U.S. government. It was established in 1949 to spread pro-Western news and promote democratic values and institutions in countries behind the Iron Curtain.

The head of the radio’s Belarus service, Alexander Lukashuk, said the attack began on the 22nd anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe in neighboring Ukraine. He said a similar attack took place the same day one year ago but lasted only hours and did not hit services in other languages.

"We have a large Internet audience (in Belarus) that was relying on us to report live a rally of thousands of people protesting the plight of uncompensated Chernobyl victims and a government decision to build a new nuclear power station," he said.

The broadcaster suggested the government of authoritarian Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko could be behind the attack.

"It’s very hard to be certain in these cases but because the target was the Belarus service it does look like it’s coming from the Belarus government," said Diane Zeleny, spokeswoman for the broadcaster.

"For our listeners in Belarus, it’s quite dramatic," Zeleny said. "They cannot reach us right now. This is a pretty massive attack."

"There was no immediate response from the Belarussian government."

The station moved its headquarters to Prague from Munich, Germany, in 1995, after the collapse of communism. It broadcasts in 28 languages to 21 countries, including Iran and Iraq since 1998, and Afghanistan since 2002.

Senator: China Plans To Spy on Olympic Hotel Guests

A U.S. senator accused the Chinese government on Thursday of ordering U.S.-owned hotels in China to install Internet filters that can spy on international visitors coming to see the summer Olympic games.

Sen. Sam Brownback, a Kansas Republican, made the charge at a Capitol Hill news conference where he and other lawmakers denounced China's record of human rights abuses and urged President Bush not to attend the Olympic's opening ceremonies in Beijing.

"This is wrong, it's against international conventions, it's certainly against the Olympic spirit," Brownback said. "The Chinese government should remove that request and that order."

Brownback said he has seen the language of memos received by at least two U.S.-owned hotels. He declined to name them, and said he obtained the information from two "reliable but confidential sources" in the hope that public pressure would persuade the Chinese government to back off the demand.

The filters could enable the government to monitor Web sites viewed by hotel guests and restrict Internet information coming in and out of China, Brownback said.

The senator called China "the foremost enabler of human rights abuses around the world" and said the Chinese government is turning the summer games into "an Olympics of oppression."

A call Thursday to the Chinese embassy in Washington was not immediately returned.

Beijing has said that its citizens' human rights are protected under the Chinese constitution, and that it welcomed renewed dialogue on the issue. But Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao also has suggested the U.S. politicians were biased in their views.

"We hope relevant people, congressmen, can view our progress made in human rights objectively and take off their colored glasses. I believe that would be beneficial to the development of Chinese human rights," he said at a recent news conference in Beijing.

For years, critics in the U.S. Congress have taken China to task for what they describe as unfair trade practices; currency manipulation; use of the Internet to suppress dissidents; failure to use its leverage to stop violence in Sudan's Darfur region; and a rapid, secretive military buildup.

Other lawmakers at Brownback's news conference condemned the Chinese government for supporting repressive governments in Sudan and Burma, suppressing dissent in Tibet and forcibly returning North Korean refugees

who flee across the border, where they face imprisonment and torture.

"The number one accomplice of the genocide in Darfur is the Chinese government," said Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va. "No official in the executive branch, in the judicial branch and particularly in the congressional branch ought to attend the opening ceremonies of this Olympics."

More than a dozen former North Korean refugees who escaped to China and suffered beatings, imprisonment and other persecution at the hands of Chinese officials attended the news conference to discuss their plight.

While China wants the Olympics to be a sign of the country's growing prominence on the international stage, Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., said the country's actions confirm that "the Chinese people still live under an iron fist."

"The Chinese government was awarded the games on the understanding that it would work to significantly improve it's human rights record," Menendez said. "Clearly, it has not."

Brownback said he would press his case for Bush not to attend the Olympic opening ceremonies when the president visits tornado-damaged Greensburg, Kan., on Sunday.

Thus far, Bush has given no indication he will skip the Beijing event.

US Man Gets 30 Months in Prison for 'Warez' Operation

A Woodbury, Connecticut, man has been sentenced to 30 months in prison for operating Web sites where users could download unauthorized copies of movies, music and software titles, the U.S. Department of Justice announced.

David M. Fish, 26, was sentenced Monday on criminal copyright infringement and circumvention charges in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California in San Jose, the DOJ announced late Tuesday. Prosecutors accused Fish of operating so-called warez sites offering downloads of thousands of products protected by copyright. In addition to a 30-month prison term, Judge Ronald Whyte sentenced Fish to three years of probation following his prison term and the forfeiture of computer and other equipment used in the copyright offenses.

Fish pleaded guilty on Feb. 27, 2006, to five counts, including four counts in the Northern District of California case for conspiracy to commit criminal copyright infringement; distribution of technology primarily designed to circumvent encryption technology protecting a right of a copyright owner and aiding and abetting; circumventing a technological measure that protects a copyright work and aiding and abetting; copyright infringement by electronic means and aiding and abetting. On the same day, Fish also pleaded guilty to one count of criminal infringement of a copyright on charges from the Southern District of Iowa, the DOJ said.

The two cases involved separate investigations, but the charges were prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of California.

From about August 2004 to July 2005, Fish served as the operator, equipment supplier and scripter for warez sites, according to the charges in the California case. Fish also defeated technology measures designed to protect DVDs that had been copyrighted, the DOJ said.

Fish participated in a separate warez site from January 2003 to April 2004, according to the Iowa charges. The warez site's server contained about 13,000 pirated works, including movies, games, utility software and music, the DOJ said. Transfer logs showed that Fish assisted in the uploading of 131 software titles and the downloading of 373 software titles to and from the warez FTP (File Transfer Protocol) server between August 2003 and March 2004, the DOJ said.

The California case is part of Operation Copycat, an investigation by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Attorney's Office targeting online warez groups. Operation Copycat has resulted in 40 convictions so far. The DOJ has been conducting Operation Copycat and related investigations for more than two years.

Microsoft Insists XP Death Date Firm Despite Ballmer

Despite CEO Steve Ballmer's comments, Microsoft has no plans to continue selling Windows XP after June 30, the company said Thursday. It added, "Our plan for Windows XP availability is unchanged. We're confident that's the right thing to do based on the feedback we've heard from our customers and partners."

Ballmer started a wave of speculation at a press conference in Belgium when he suggested that the June 30 deadline could be changed. "If customer feedback varies we can always wake up smarter, but right now we have a plan for end-of-life for new XP shipments," he said, according to Reuters.

A spokesperson from Microsoft's public-relations firm, Waggoner Edstrom, told PC World that the company's research had led it to conclude that "the dates are right." Microsoft believes "we've made the right accommodations for customers in certain segments who may need more time to transition to Windows Vista," she said. "But as Steve noted, we maintain a constant stance of listening to our customers and our partners. That's what is guiding our plan, and will continue to guide us going forward."

The anecdotal evidence suggests otherwise. More than 170,000 people have signed an online petition spearheaded by InfoWorld magazine to "Save XP." The petition calls for Microsoft to keep XP around "indefinitely. Not just for another six months or a year but indefinitely." And enterprise adoption of Windows Vista has so far been tepid.

"Ballmer's cryptic comments suggest that although they say they listen to customers, they're hard of hearing," said Galen Gruman, the InfoWorld editor who launched the petition, in an e-mail. "On one hand, Ballmer's comments acknowledge a demand for XP beyond June 30, but then he indicated that demand is trivial. I believe he's wrong."

Gruman foresees a rising chorus in favor of XP as the clock counts down to the deadline. "I believe the voices for Microsoft to change will only grow louder as we get into the final 60 days of XP sales, as more

and more people wake up to what is happening," he said.

One of Microsoft's "accommodations" is a downgrade option in which organizations making volume purchases of Vista Business and Ultimate can license XP instead. Microsoft is also continuing XP sales to manufacturers of small-form, low-cost PCs like HP's new Mini-Note.

Dell recently announced it would take advantage of the program to offer XP on several home PC models - not just on a CD for consumers to install themselves but installed as the default operating system. "If Microsoft wants to stick to its official June 30 deadline but let PC makers work around it through the downgrade option so Microsoft can still claim a Vista sale, well, that's better than completely killing XP," Gruman said.

At the end of the day, despite Microsoft's current resolve, "end-of-life scenarios are not written in stone," said Charles King, principal analyst with Pund-IT, in a telephone interview. June 30 is an extension of a previous January deadline, and support for Windows NT was pushed out several years, King noted.

While Microsoft can show gains in Vista simply because it will be installed on all new computers, the critical question is business adoption.

"Consumers just use what they get," King said, "but for businesses with thousands or tens of thousands of users, if a new operating system is not predictable and stable, if it's so different people have to take time out of their days to learn how to use it, business will not adopt it."

Microsoft will be watching Vista sales in the enterprise "very carefully," King said. Ultimately, "if they produced a product that doesn't resonate, you just have to heave a sigh that you made a mistake and move on. You can't force customers to buy a product. If they look at the market and believe Vista is endangering the goodwill they have with customers, they'll do the right thing and walk away."

WWW Inventor Says Web Only in Infancy

The World Wide Web is still only in its infancy, its British inventor said Wednesday, on the 15th anniversary of the web's effective launch.

Tim Berners-Lee told the BBC that the web, which started life in the CERN physics laboratory on the Franco-Swiss border in the early 1990s, could develop in unimaginable directions but above all should be a force for good.

"What's exciting is that people are building new social systems, new systems of review, new systems of governance," he said.

"My hope is that those will produce... new ways of working together effectively and fairly which we can use globally to manage ourselves as a planet."

The comments came on the anniversary of the announcement by CERN on April 30, 1993 that the World Wide Web could be used by everyone, after

Berners-Lee and a colleague persuaded their bosses to provide the programme code for free.

The web - of which the abbreviation www forms the start of all online addresses - is now the ubiquitous network via which information is shared on the Internet. An estimated 165 million websites now exist, the BBC reported.

"The web has been a tremendous tool for people to do a lot of good even though you can find bad stuff out there," said Berners-Lee, adding that one day the web will put "all the data in the world" at the fingertips of every user.

But "we have only started to explore the possibilities of (the web)," he said, adding that it was "still in its infancy".

Robert Cailliau, who worked with Berners-Lee to open up the web, stressed that not all the bosses at CERN were in favour of making the web universally accessible.

"We had to convince them that this was going to take off and it was a really big thing. And therefore CERN couldn't hold on to it and the best thing to do was to give it away," he said.

Competing technologies - such as Gopher developed at the University of Minnesota in the United States - were also offering a way of connecting documents on the Internet, he said.

"If we had put a price on it like the University of Minnesota had done with Gopher then it would not have expanded into what it is now.

"We would have had some sort of market share alongside services like AOL and Compuserve, but we would not have flattened the world."

Criminals Try To "Copyright" Malware

Even criminal hackers want to protect their intellectual property, and they've come up with a method akin to copyrighting - with an appropriate dash of Internet thuggery thrown in.

Professional virus writers are now selling a suite of software on the Internet with an unusual attachment: a detailed licensing agreement that promises penalties for redistributing the malicious code without permission.

"I just kind of chuckled - it's kind of humorous," said Zulfikar Ramzan, senior principal security researcher with Symantec Corp.

Symantec researchers noticed a Russian-language example floating around the Internet and wrote about it on the company's official blog this week. They said it's the only example they've seen.

The software is used to infect computers and control them remotely. The zombie machines can be used to pump out spam, launch more attacks or steal personal information from their owners.

Networks of zombie machines - known as "bot nets" - can be extremely

lucrative, sometimes bringing millions of dollars in profit for their authors and their distributors. To maximize that profit, the software analyzed by Symantec's researchers contained the following rules:

* The customer can't resell the product, examine its underlying coding, use it to control other bot nets or submit it to antivirus companies and agrees to pay the seller a fee for product updates.

* The threat: Violate the terms, and we'll report you ourselves to the antivirus companies by giving them information about how to dismantle your bot network or prevent it from growing bigger.

While not legally binding, the terms amount to a novel way to protect ill-gotten profits - except that by ratting out their customers, malware authors risk drawing attention to their own enterprises and giving antivirus makers clues on combatting them.

"We know they can't actually enforce it, and they probably wouldn't try," Ramzan said. "What's funny is they put more effort into their EULA (end-user license agreement) than traditional software companies might."

The ultimate rub? Apparently the threat was not only hollow but unheeded. Symantec said the program that's accompanied by the novel rules is being traded freely online - and so far its authors haven't called Symantec to make good on their threat.

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